



Frequently Asked Booster Seat Questions



Michigan Law

Children under age 8 and under 4'9" (57 inches) tall must be in a child restraint. A child restraint can be a car seat with harness straps or a booster seat used with the vehicle's lap & shoulder seat belt.

Michigan law also requires children under age 4 to ride in a child restraint in the back seat of a vehicle if the vehicle has a back seat. If all available back seats are occupied by children less than four, then a child less than four may ride in a child restraint system in the front seat. Rear-facing child restraints can ONLY be placed in the front seat if there is no other option and the passenger side air bag is turned OFF.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q. My child is under age 8, but over 4'9" tall. Does she need to be in a booster seat or car seat by law?

A. No.

Example: If Suzie is 6 years old and 4'11" tall, she is legally not required to be in a car seat (*she may be safer in one, see 5-step test at end of this document to be sure*).

Q. My child is over age 8, but under 4'9" tall. Is he legally required to be in a booster seat or car seat?

A. No.

Example: If Max is 9 years old and 4'6" tall, he is not required to be in a booster by law (*he may be safer in one, see 5-step test at end of this document to be sure*).

Q. I only have lap belts in my car. Can I use a booster seat with a lap belt only?

A. No. A booster seat **MUST** be used with a lap & shoulder seat belt combination. Furthermore, there are no exemptions in the law for lap belts. There are child restraints available with harnesses that have higher weight limits for larger children. These seats can be installed with a lap belt only.

Q. I have only a lap belt position left in the back seat for my child that normally rides in a booster. Can she sit there without a booster?

A. No. There are no exemptions in the law for lap-only belts. If this is the case, it would be safer to put the child in a booster in the front seat and use the lap & shoulder seat belt. Be sure to move the vehicle seat as far back as possible and make sure the child stays properly seated in the booster at all times.

Q. When can my child move out of her car seat and into a booster seat?

A. Children should ride in a child restraint with a complete harness system as long as possible (until at least 40 lbs).

Q. My 2 ½ year-old has outgrown her car seat. Can I use a booster seat?

A. Most children under age 3 are too immature to sit still in a booster with a lap & shoulder seat belt, which allows them to lean forward or sideways. This could be very dangerous in a crash or hard-braking situation. Parents should consider getting a larger seat with a harness system for younger or more active children who have outgrown their child restraint.

Q. My child weighs over 100 pounds and booster seats don't fit her. She is 6 years old and under 4'9" tall. What should I do?

A. Michigan law requires children to ride in a child restraint until they are 8 years old or 4'9" tall. There are booster seats available with weight limits over 100 pounds and some with expandable backs to accommodate different sizes of children. Special products such as vests may also be an option.

Q. Should I use a backless booster or a booster with a high back?

A. If your vehicle seat has a low back (no head support), you should use a high-back booster. If your vehicle seat *does* have a high back, you can use either one if it fits your vehicle. There is evidence to suggest that high-back boosters provide some side-impact protection in a crash. Always be sure to choose a seat that fits your child and your vehicle.

Q. Can I use a booster seat with a shield or just get one of those adjusters that attaches to the seat belt?

A. No. None of the shield boosters pass current federal safety standards for children over 40 pounds. Devices that can be attached to a lap & shoulder seat belt to re-position the belt (such as clips or fabric sleeves) are not required to pass federal safety standards. In fact, these devices reduce the effectiveness of the seat belt. They also tend to pull the lap portion of the belt over the child's soft tummy area.

Q. Where can I go to have someone look at my car seat or booster to tell me if I am using it correctly?

A. There are certified child passenger safety technicians around the state trained to do so. Click here <http://cert.safekids.org> and then select the yellow apple on the right side of the page to find a technician near you.

Q. Why is it important for children who have outgrown car seats to use booster seats?

A. Children over age 4 have higher rates of injury than younger children for several reasons. Many of them place the shoulder belt under their arm or behind their back because the seat belt doesn't fit them properly. Vehicle seats and seat belts are designed for adult bodies. A booster seat is needed to keep the lap belt on the upper thighs and the shoulder belt centered on the shoulder and chest.

Q. Does my child need to use a booster when they ride with someone else?

A. Yes. Car crashes are the number one killer of kids. Young children who are placed in seat belts alone rather than boosters are 59% more likely to suffer devastating injuries, including severe damage to the brain, liver, spleen, and spinal cord. Most children need to use a booster seat from about age 4 until at least age 8-10 for maximum protection and improved comfort in the car.

Q. My child fits in the seat belt in our car but I'm not sure about grandma's car. What should I do?

A. Every vehicle is different. A child might fit properly in the adult seat belt in one car, but not in another. Please have your child take the 5-step test for each vehicle to be sure (see next page).

5-Step Test to Determine if a Child Needs a Booster Seat

Have your child get ready for a “pretend” ride by sitting in the car and buckling up with the lap & shoulder belt in the back seat then answer the following the questions:

1. Is the child sitting tall so his/her whole back is touching the vehicle seatback? (If no, please ask the child to move all the way back before continuing.)
2. Do the child’s knees bend comfortably at the edge of the seat?
3. Does the belt cross the shoulder between the neck and arm?
4. Is the lap belt touching the tops of the legs and not riding up over the stomach?
5. Can the child sit like this for the whole trip?

If the answer to any of these questions is “no,” the child needs a booster seat to ride safely in the car.



Exception: A special product (large car seat or harness/vest) may be needed if there are no shoulder belts in the back seat of the car OR if the child is very active, OR if the child is over 40 lbs. & under age 3-4.